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ABSTRACT

Evidence from this comparative investigation of the Soviet Union, China, and the United States shows that different countries attach their own political meaning and ideology to physical activity in order to stabilize and strengthen themselves, and thus, better promote their respective ideology in the international marketplace of political power. Government-sponsored writings on both political ideology and stated cultural approaches to physical activity were analyzed, and other sources were used to compare stated positions with actual practice. In the U.S., ideology is rarely overtly stated, but it is directed toward individual perseverance and hard work to gain success; similar patterns apply to physical activity. In the U.S.S.R., worker ownership and collective action resulting in an appropriate reward for service rendered is the stated ideology, and the "physical culture" seems consistent with this. In China, ideology is similar to that of the Soviet Union, with an added element of self-criticism, and the physical activity again reflects this. The U.S. ideology depends on continued winning and dominance to form elite groups, while in China the mass-based program seems to indicate a working toward betterment for many people. The U.S.S.R. fits somewhere in between these two. (Author/DS)

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SOCIO-POLITICAL USE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN THE UNITED STATES, THE SOVIET UNION AND CHINA

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Since all people move, movement is something that potentially relates to all of our lives. As such, movement crosses political boundaries, language difference and cultural diversity. It also takes on the cultural identity of the person performing. It therefore has the potential to be a useful and significant tool for ideological socialization. Most countries have an ideological stake in the international political market place. It is my opinion that to gain a place in this marketplace that they utilize sport and physical education/culture to stabilize their own populations, and as an overt expression of their respective system's strength and power

Given this seeming ubiquitous relationship of ideology and movement, this presentation will investigate ideology in three societies (China, U.S. and the Soviet Union). A dominant ideology for each country will be presented. This ideology will be explored in terms of each country's participation in physical activity. Since physical education and sport participation often center themselves in the school system, the educational environment will be the main arena in which this investigation of physical activity and ideology will focus. Both public statements by government and "actual practice" by the people will be looked at in attempting to grasp the complexities of the respective ideologies.

United States

The dominant ideology in the United States, as in most countries, revolves around economic inter-relations of the people. The capitalist model of the U.S. involves individual competition among its members. Hard work, perseverance, and a few "breaks" will allow for success and upward mobility. An individual competitive orientation however, enhances the

the chance that only a few people will enter this elite at any given time. The chance to enter this elite group increases considerably depending on an individuals beginning resources. Working within the system and acting in a "democratic" manner are important.[1] There is little emphasis on group or collective action. "Team" endeavors are participated in with the idea of individual components and responsibility.

There is no publicly stated ideological connection between government and physical education/sport. The U.S. is one of the few countries in the world not having a ministry level position concerned with this aspect of life. Although physical education and sport do not have a formally stated connection to American political ideology, they do entertain the same beliefs.

As part of the educational system, most physical education is locally controlled at the state or school district level. Each area is left to its own decisions concerning their own programs. There is no centralized national program for either physical education or sport.[2]

Physical education and sport activities are primarily of a competitive nature and individually oriented. Even in school physical education classes (where the stated ideology is "fun", health and fitness) there is normally competition promoted to see who can be the best at a skill.

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1. This democratic manner however, means "we all have an equal chance and if I get there instead of you, tough luck; we all had our chance.
2. The closest one comes to some type of "national" program would be the AAU, NCAA, AIAW, etc.

The pinnacle of the participant sport world are professional leagues or high level amateur competitions. High schools and colleges act as feeders to these higher levels of competition. A process goes on to select the best, or elite, performers. Similar ideas that hard work, perseverance, and a few breaks will get you to the top pervade at all levels of competition. However, the numerical odds of this selective system will not allow for many people to continue to the top of the ladder.[1]

Even though they can't reach the top, many people continue to participate in an activity (ie. golf, tennis, running) with the intent of "proving" that they are better than someone else. This winning directed orientation encourages sport performance rather than participation for health and fitness. Health and fitness do not necessarily produce winners. Many athletes are not "fit", but they can do their specialized skill well.

A cult of spectators has been built up to watch, and reinforce, this type of dominance through winning. Spectating has become a way for the general population to associate with elite groups.[2]

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1. Ashe, A. "Our Youth Need Prose, Not Pros," S.F. Chronicle, 14 Feb. 1977
Clark, M. "Social Control Through Sport: A Conceptual Framework, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University (forthcoming 1978)
Edwards, H. Sociology of Sport, Homewood: The Dorsey Press, 1973
Ogilvie, Bruce and Thomas A. Tutko "Sports Don't Build Character," Psychology Today, Oct. 1971

2. This is the next best thing for those who realized that they will never be able to live the stated belief and become an elite. Since most professional athletes, or high level amateurs, are considered as elites (and get much fame, fortune, and noteriety), and their business is movement (which we can all can do, can associate with, and can understand) this link with an elite group seems viable.

This type of domination through winning has several levels. In elementary school, physical education and sport is not highly organized, but it is through "free play" and other competitive activity (grades, etc) that this belief system seems to start. Team competition in the higher elementary grades and high school tend to be more highly organized. Degrees of "best" are defined by how much winning takes place. Leagues are formed, statistics and records are kept. All this helps define who dominates and becomes a "winner". A consistent pattern of winning then defines the elite athlete group.

The Soviet Union

The dominant ideology of the USSR also relates to economic interrelations of its people. It states a goal of working toward the communistic state. In this state, each person produces according to their ability and receives according to their need. Everyone works for others as well as themselves. Workers (or the "people) will gain control of the means of production. They will govern themselves in a true "democratic" sense. Collective action, as an ideological orientation, is seen as a necessary endeavor to reach and sustain this type of society. Consequently, most ideal types of educational behavior involve some type of collective endeavor.[1] This seems true for physical activity since there is the stated government position on the connections of sport and physical culture to the dominant political ideology.

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1. Bronfenbrenner, Urie Two Worlds of Childhood: U.S. and U.S.S.R., New York: Pocket Books. 1972

Education in the USSR, as in the other countries discussed, is a selective process, but the term culture implies that something can be participated in by all, not just those within the educational system. Therefore, you do not stop participating in physical activity when you finish school, but have a responsibility to do it all your life. This seems consistent with stated intents of physical culture and fitness for national defense and greater productivity.

Socialization to the dominant ideology through physical culture begins in pre-school classes where physical games are an organized and structured part of the curriculum. Physical culture is nationally controlled and a mandatory part of all schooling. Classes are structured toward basic movement forms and general fitness (includes climbing, running, throwing, tumbling, general exercises).

The reality of practice may differ somewhat from the stated ideology if recent reports are to be believed. 75% of Soviet schools have no gymnasiums; 50% have little or no sport equipment; and 40% of those teaching physical culture are not certificated by the state to teach in this area.[1]

Sport competitions are described as collective endeavors. Kids are supposed to work and train together, and generally help each other improve. Inter-school competition is relatively unheard of until the college level or unless one is a member of established sport clubs. These competitions usually include the best Soviet athletes.

1. From a quote attributed to M.I. Kondakov (Soviet Deputy - Minister of Education) in Riordan, James, " Sport Boarding Schools in the USSR," JOPER, May 1975.
However, it should be noted, that percentages of schools may not be totally relavent figures here. If most urban schools (most of the population) have facilities and teachers and only the small isolated country schools are lacking necessary facilities and equipment, then the interpretation of the figures loses strength. If health and fitness through exercise are the goals, then facilities and equipment are not prerequisite. Facilities and equipment are prerequisite, however, to sport participation and training of athletes.

For the school populace at large there are the "Spartakaides". In the past, these competitions have been the base of local, regional, and national collective sport programs. During this period the USSR used a mass participation base as a means of identifying athletes at an early age. Since 1962, however, less importance has been placed on the Spartakaides and more importance placed on the "Sport Boarding School" for producing high caliber international athletes.[1] The function of these sport boarding schools is similar to other Soviet boarding schools, the production of trained specialists in the respective field. Early testing selects for athletic potential; then intensive instruction and training follows. Although general education is part of the curriculum, the specific purpose of these schools is to turn out high level athletes and other types of physical culture/sport experts.

In these schools, students have the best of equipment and facilities. General fitness and health are not so much emphasized as is the training in a specific sport; or training in an auxillary role such as trainer/coach. What these schools seem to have done is created a specially priviledged sport elite. These "individuals" perform at the direction of, and for the service of their country to further its national ideology, but the government seems to give up that same ideology to produce these athletes. The separation of this group, through the boarding schools, from the rest of collective interaction in society has recently met some resistance from parents.[2] It seems parents are either knowledgeable of the elite forming process of athletes and do not desire their children to participate, or possibly they merely desire to keep their kids in the normal school tracts and give them a better chance at entry into the more traditional government and intellectual elite groups.

1. Osnos, Peter "Soviets Mix Sports with Indoctrination," S.F. Chronicle, 27 July 1974 and Riordan, James "Sports Boarding Schools in the USSR," JOPER, May 1975
2. Riordan, James "Sports Boarding Schools in the USSR," JOPER, May 1975

CHINA

Chinese ideology is similar to that presented in the Soviet section, with one major addition, continued self-criticism to get at the stated goals of the communist state. The Cultural Revolution was probably the most extreme example of this part of ideology in action.

Physical culture is again the preferred term and for the same reasons. Physical culture is a stated part of the national school curriculum. Again, the stated government policy intent is to develop strong, fit, healthy bodies for defense and increased production. Physical culture is part of all levels of education, from preschool through the university. Most classes consist of basic movements for overall body fitness. It is stated that kids in most all schools practice "Mao's Eight Exercises" (developed to work every part of the body) in a collective group at least once a day outside of structured classes.[1] Stronger or more fit students have a group responsibility to help raise the fitness levels of those less fit.[2] Collective physical culture, in this practical sense, has a direct connection to the stated dominant ideology. There is little inter-school competition. Instead, "Sport Days" are held where all (or probably most) students participate in a multitude of different games and sport type activities. Few scores are kept and no winners are crowned. Facilities are spartan, but this not necessarily inconsistant with an ideology stressing health and fitness through exercise.

To date, little is really known about the schools or training programs to develop international caliber athletes. The stated ideology is "friendship first, competition second." It seems that most athletes come from the mass exercise and participation programs and do practice the stated

1. Lee, Vivian "Exercise Important to Chinese," The Stanford Daily, 26 May 1976, Report on a month long trip to China by Harry Edwards, a sociologist at U C. Berkeley.
2. Ibid

ideology. It may be for expediency sake however, since often they have little chance to win (or are so overwhelming that they can afford to be generous). There are after school facilities (the so called "children's palaces") in urban areas where there is the opportunity for advanced sport and dance instruction and participation. These facilities are not, however, just for high level participants. Anyone can go to them.

There is also the Institute of Physical Culture in Peking. This university level school trains physical culture teachers and administrators. Few athletes seem to have been produced here although advanced instruction is provided.

There is some spectating, but it seems directed toward appreciation of performance in general rather than rooting for the home team to win. Tickets are inexpensive and this allows most who would like to watch a chance to do so.

Political leaders seem to have taken a real interest in the "physical" in China. One of Mao's earlier essays titled "A Study of Physical Culture" was written in 1917. His activity and reported swim in the Yangtse River also helped people focus on physical culture as a civic responsibility. Almost every piece written about chinese schools includes something about programs of physical culture and/or dance. Ministry level positions have been delegated to deal with different types of physical culture.

Comparative Effort

All the presented governments utilization of "common experience" to socialize their populations to a specific ideology. The U.S. ideology depends on continued winning, and dominance, to form the elite groups (and the desire to enter them) which justify and reinforce their ideology. The Chinese do not seem intent on using sport to "dominate" other ideologies.

Their massed based program seems to indicate a working toward betterment for many people. Their stated ideology does not depend on continued dominance to reinforce itself. What happens when China develops many world class athletes remains to be seen. The USSR fits somewhere in between these two positions.

In the U.S., physical education and sport have the conotation of "leisure" pursuits. This situation is contrasted with China where physical culture is serious business for people of all ages in terms of national defense and increased productivity. The Soviet Union fits somewhere in between. Mass based participation is still preached and practices, but elite formation through sport does seem to have become a reality. This compares somewhat with the situation in the U.S. To date, this elite formation through sport does not seem to have happened in China. China does not deny the fact that elites will be present (there will almost always be some stratification differential by ability on a given skill or talent); however, it feels that the responsibility of this elite is to work with and help the level of those less skilled. This orientation does not seem present in either the U S. or the Soviet Union.

"Reality" of given situations has been presented to this point. However, paradox after paradox constantly present themselves. Many things "seem to be"; but are they really what we think they are? Conscious and unconscious paradox is the constant companion of our perceptions of both physical activity and ideology. The reminder of which is the real point of this presentation.